

# **Leonard and Bina Ellen Art Gallery**

## **Strategic Plan**

**2009-2014**



### **Director's Message**

I am pleased to present this Strategic Plan for the Leonard and Bina Ellen Art Gallery to the Concordia University Community. Covering the years 2009-2014, this plan maps out the broad directions that the Gallery will follow to achieve its vision, build on its recent success Canada wide and contribute to the visibility and reputation of the University. A strategic plan maps out broad, desirable goals that an organization pursues in different ways depending on the mix of university, government, and other environmental conditions that impact on it. A strategic plan also provides an anchor during times of change that focus the efforts of an organization even as adjustments are made in the manner it pursues its goals. This plan will serve the Ellen Gallery well in this respect and allow it to grow in a manner corresponding to its ambitious programs.

The history of the Leonard and Bina Ellen Gallery is linked to the creation of a collection for the University. In 1962, Montreal businessman Samuel Schecter set up a fund to be used for the purchase of Canadian art for Sir George Williams University. Three years later, he would create another collection, this time at Loyola College. When Sir George Williams University and Loyola College merged in 1974 under the name "Concordia," their respective collections were also combined. The first gallery was called the Sir George Williams Art Galleries and was opened in 1966 in the Hall Building. It was renamed Concordia Art Gallery in 1984, and in 1992 was relocated in the newly constructed McConnell library complex and inaugurated as the Leonard and Bina Ellen Art Gallery in honor of important benefactors to the University. The programming of the Gallery has evolved over the years. Initially, its programming had two axes: one directed towards contemporary Canadian art with a focus on Concordia-based artists and touring exhibitions of Canadian artists; and the other directed toward Canadian historical art, reflecting departmental interests. In 2002 an important endowment was created with the desire to give the Gallery a new impetus. After a national competition a new Director was appointed in 2003 and the Gallery's programming vision, in keeping with similar changes

## **Ellen Gallery Strategic Plan 2009-2014**

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in university art galleries across Canada, was refocused more exclusively on critical explorations of contemporary art and curatorial approaches, opening it up to international practices and contexts.

It is in this environment that we convened a planning group to discuss the future of the Ellen Gallery. This plan situates the Ellen Gallery as an important contributor to the mission of Concordia University and emphasizes its role in providing opportunities for the internal and external communities to experience art in critical ways that enrich their Concordia experience. It clearly articulates the challenges that accompany this mission, and it is my hope that this plan will provide a locus for collaboration that will help the Gallery and the University come together to achieve our common goals.

I extend my thanks to the members of the planning committee who generously took time from their busy schedules to contribute so constructively to our discussions and ensure this plan would benefit both the Gallery and the University. Finally, I would like to thank Jonathan Levinson, Chief-of-Staff in the Office of the President, who provided the opportunity for this committee to be formed and to achieve its goals by providing funding support.

### **The Planning Process**

In the spring of 2008, the Leonard and Bina Ellen Art Gallery at Concordia University embarked on a process to create a strategic plan that would better situate the Ellen Gallery within the University community and would provide shared understanding of its direction over the next five years. Concordia's Institutional Planning Office (IPO) was asked to facilitate the planning exercise. While the Ellen Gallery staff prepared documentation on the Gallery, its history, and its current direction, the IPO collected information from university art galleries across Canada in order to prepare materials on

## **Ellen Gallery Strategic Plan 2009-2014**

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the Canadian university art gallery context that would inform the strategic planning committee's deliberations.

### *The Canadian University Art Gallery Context*

Survey Report on University Art Galleries. Background work for the planning sessions included an examination of the "Survey Report on University Art Galleries," which presents the results of a survey of university art galleries conducted in 2006 by the University and College Art Galleries Association of Canada (UCAGAC). This report outlines several common features found among university art galleries, which are charged with the care of "a major part of the nation's patrimony in the visual arts." These areas include:

*Reporting structures:* over half report to a President or Vice-President, most have a consultative advisory board, and all maintain full autonomy over programming and acquisitions.

*Connections with university and teaching:* a majority engage in supervision and mentoring graduate and undergraduate students.

*Staffing:* a majority report staffing shortages that threaten best-practice standards.

*Programs:* nearly all offer year-round curated exhibitions, publish catalogues and monographs, and offer public programming.

*Collections management:* nearly three-fourths have Category A designation as specified in the Cultural Property Export and Import Act, but most do not have a collections curator or in-house conservator.

*Facilities:* one-third indicate a need for updating their facilities.

*Budgets:* university galleries rely on a broad and diversified base of support. Nearly half receive between 75% and 100% of their budgets from their institutions, and nearly three-quarters receive operating or programming support from endowment funds or trusts specific to their gallery. Over one-third receive funding from

## **Ellen Gallery Strategic Plan 2009-2014**

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federal agencies, with nearly two-thirds receiving support from the Canada Council. Over 80% report being actively engaged in fundraising.

*Future directions:* long-term sustainability is a concern, and strategic planning is considered by most to be a necessary step in ensuring university gallery viability.

In these respects, the Ellen Gallery finds itself in a similar position to other university art galleries, and has taken action on UCAGAC final recommendation: that galleries develop “strategic plans for survival and evolution in the changing cultural environment, both within the university and in their extended communities.”

Canadian University Art Gallery Histories and Missions. The IPO also examined the history and mandate of 19 different university art galleries in Canada, looking also at the reporting structure and staffing of each. This information was used as a resource where necessary in the planning sessions. After preliminary discussions, five university gallery statements of values, vision, and mission were retained for distribution to the planning committee: The Art Gallery of York University (York), The Agnes Etherington Art Centre (Queen's), The Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery (UBC), Galerie de l'UQAM (UQAM), and The Dalhousie University Art Gallery (Dalhousie). The study of all collected statements made it clear that university galleries address overall role and purpose, programming priorities, educational role, audience definition, and contribution to institutional image in their defining documents. This plan for the Ellen Gallery takes this research into account.

### *Planning Committee Membership*

Because it is important to ensure that the strategic planning committee provides the University with as broad and relevant a picture of the Gallery's environment as possible, Concordia's committee was designed to include representation from the following groups:



## **Ellen Gallery Strategic Plan 2009-2014**

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- practicing artists
- curators and administrators from other Montréal art galleries
- university art gallery directors
- Concordia's Faculty of Fine Arts professors
- Concordia's Faculty of Fine Arts administration
- Concordia's Board of Governors
- Concordia's Advancement and Alumni Relations
- The Leonard and Bina Ellen Art Gallery at Concordia University
- Concordia University Office of the President

Many participants reflected the interests of multiple groups; a full listing is provided below under the rubric "List of Participants."

The committee met for two full days in late September 2008. Over the course of the full-day planning sessions, the Gallery's values, vision, and mission were put under close scrutiny. The committee identified, debated, and settled on recommended strategies that will ensure that the Gallery can build on its established successes and thrive over the next five years, becoming more widely known not only for the quality of its exhibitions, programs, and publications, but also for its close integration into the mission and consciousness of the University. Throughout the course of its deliberations, the Strategic Planning committee identified a series of challenges and opportunities facing the Ellen Gallery in an increasingly complex academic environment. Specifically, it recognized that while the structure, goals and measures of success within the curatorial field intersect with those of the parent academic organization, they are not always identical to them, and that the roles and the integrity of university art galleries, as a result, can be marginalized or misunderstood by the university. Consequently, it is clear that the Ellen Gallery's success in implementing the Strategic Directions that follow will be to a large degree dependant on Concordia's acknowledgement of the status of this asset, the professionals who guide it, and the value of what it uniquely contributes to the university. This

## **Ellen Gallery Strategic Plan 2009-2014**

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document is the result of the discussions that transpired at these sessions.

## **Ellen Gallery Strategic Plan 2009-2014**

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### **List of Participants**

Mathieu Beauséjour	Artist and Director of Clark, Centre d'art et de diffusion, Montréal (artist run center)
Josée Bélisle	Curator (Collection permanente), Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal
Janet M. Brooke	Director, Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Queen's University
Elspeth Cowell	Coordinator, Programs Administration, Canadian Centre for Architecture and member of the Ellen Gallery Advisory Council
Andy Dutkewych	Professor of Studio Arts, Faculty of Fine Arts, Concordia University
Brian Foss	Associate Dean, Academic and Student Affairs, Professor of Art History, Faculty of Fine Arts, Concordia University
Dominique McCaughey	Principal Director, Special Initiatives, Advancement and Alumni Relations, Concordia University and member of the Ellen Gallery Advisory Council
Tricia Middleton	Artist and Coordinator, Student Relations, Faculty of Fine Arts, Concordia University; Concordia MFA graduate
Marina Polosa	Public Programs Coordinator, Leonard and Bina Ellen Art Gallery
Michèle Thériault	Director, Leonard and Bina Ellen Art Gallery
Bradley Tucker	Director, Institutional Planning, Concordia University
Lillian Vineberg	Artist, member and former chair of the Concordia University Board of Governors, Concordia MFA graduate

The committee acknowledges the background research and the preparations for the planning sessions conducted by the staff of both the Ellen Gallery and the IPO.

### **Foundation Statements**

#### **Values**

The Leonard and Bina Ellen Art Gallery espouses excellence in the complete range of its activities. It engages the University community, the art community, and the general public in critical explorations of art. The Gallery's ability to interface with these communities positions it to promote its individual and institutional relevance as it furthers the mission of Concordia University.

- EXCELLENCE
  - The Ellen Gallery exercises best practice standards in administrative, programming, and collections management activities.
  - The Ellen Gallery pursues its programming and collecting responsibilities with intellectual integrity, rigorous expertise, and professionalism.
  - The Ellen Gallery is committed to consistently delivering compelling exhibitions and programs that bring challenging ideas to its communities through multi-layered art experiences.
- ENGAGEMENT
  - The Ellen Gallery seeks to engage a broad range of audiences, including the University community (students, faculty and staff), the local and Canadian art communities, and the general public. It seeks to engage these audiences not only as visitors to the gallery, but also as readers of its publications and visitors to its electronic tools, its programs, and its touring exhibitions.
  - The Ellen Gallery provides an engaging atmosphere and thought-provoking experience for its audiences.
  - The Ellen Gallery collaborates widely within and beyond the University to develop, nurture, and broaden the scope of its exhibitions, public programs, publications, and outreach.
  - The Ellen Gallery engages with funding agencies that represent both current and potential sources of support, as well as with current and potential donors who can help it to achieve its goals.

## **Ellen Gallery Strategic Plan 2009-2014**

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- CRITICAL EXPLORATION
  - Critical thinking underlies the Ellen Gallery's research, educational, curatorial, and publishing approaches.
  - The Ellen Gallery functions as a laboratory where innovative, creative, and diverse approaches to art can be considered and debated.
  - The Ellen Gallery is uniquely positioned through its research and programs to engage its audiences to explore critical understandings of art and the nature of its experience.
- PERTINENCE
  - The Ellen Gallery conducts research and generates significant art-based knowledge, to be experienced in rich, differentiated ways by its audiences.
  - The Ellen Gallery provides a unique opportunity for the University to interface with the public and to promote the University's values.
  - The Ellen Gallery produces research that contributes to the advancement of knowledge about art and curatorial practices among its audiences and to the enhancement of the University's research and educational mission.

## **Ellen Gallery Strategic Plan 2009-2014**

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### **Vision**

The Leonard and Bina Ellen Art Gallery is a contemporary art gallery that is committed to promoting the critical exploration of art. It seeks to build on the visibility and reputation it has established locally and nationally by expanding its capacity to attract the University community, the art community, and the general public to explore and engage with the ever changing parameters of contemporary art practice, curatorial practice, modes of public engagement, critical writing, and collecting. It seeks to further capitalize on its location within downtown Montreal's Concordia University to connect its audiences with the idea that the creation, presentation, and multi-layered experience of art are forms of critical inquiry that constitute ways of thinking and of being.

### **Mission**

The Leonard and Bina Ellen Art Gallery creates and promotes a stimulating and innovative environment in the form of exhibitions, public programs, and publications that conform to the highest professional standards. It shares Concordia University's values, vision, and mission, which guide and impact on its role in experimentation, research, and education. Its programming focus continues to evolve in challenging ways, and frames the experience of Canadian art within an international context.

Thus, the Ellen Gallery functions as an important interface bringing the world to Concordia and taking Concordia to the world. In the first instance, it functions as a window that brings into the University the larger presence of the art world through programming that provides a focal point for the larger debates in the contemporary art milieu. It offers Concordia immediate access to forms of knowledge and to experiences that are unique to art and that contribute to further developing their critical faculties. In the second instance, the Ellen Gallery serves as window through which the external community sees the Gallery engaged in the University's mission, whether in research, education, or local and national cultural life. In addition, the Gallery carries out the physical and intellectual care of its collection according to the highest professional standards.

# **Ellen Gallery Strategic Plan 2009-2014**

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## **STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS**

### **Exhibitions, Public Programs, and Publications**

The Leonard and Bina Ellen Art Gallery at Concordia University will continue to maintain a professional stature that attracts local, national, and international attention to its exhibitions, public programs, and publications.

- The Ellen Gallery will continue to develop programs and projects with local, national, and international reach that will develop or sustain the interest of these audiences.
- The Ellen Gallery will continue to offer programming that enhances the University's profile through its positive critical reception both locally and nationally.
- The Ellen Gallery will actively develop appropriate local, national, and international collaborations in the development of its exhibitions, public programs and publications, both internal and external to the University.
- The Ellen Gallery will engage in developing a programming endowment through collaboratively identifying its place in the priorities of the University and in the University's upcoming Comprehensive Fundraising Campaign. This activity will require systematic benchmarking with other university art galleries.
- The Ellen Gallery will continue to aggressively pursue sources of public financing available solely for support of art galleries' programming activities.

### **Marketing and Communications**

The Leonard and Bina Ellen Art Gallery at Concordia University will create a communications plan that will frame its engagement in marketing and communications and that will draw greater attention to its activities to enhance interest in them.

- The Ellen Gallery will expand its profile, both inside and outside of Concordia, in a manner that is consistent with its reputation and mission and that of the University.
- The Ellen Gallery will work with the University administration to arrange for the installation of interior and exterior signage that will draw greater attention to the location of the Gallery.
- The Ellen Gallery will use traditional modes of communication (e.g., mail, telephone, the Concordia Journal, and The Concordia University Magazine), as well as electronic methods that take advantage of the latest technologies (e.g., the internet, blast emails, and campus flat-screen monitors), to communicate with its various audiences.

## **Ellen Gallery Strategic Plan 2009-2014**

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- The Ellen Gallery will develop guidelines and policy statements by which events can be held that are consistent with its reputation, mission, and exhibition agreements, and that draw attention to its contributions to Concordia's teaching and research mission.
- The Ellen Gallery will collaborate with University Communications Services to ensure that it is integrated into the University's messaging. To this end, it will create and provide information that will allow it to benefit from Concordia's established marketing and media relations activities.
- The Ellen Gallery will intensify its faculty outreach activities, ensuring that professors from across the University come to engage in the various opportunities the Gallery offers to enrich their own experience at Concordia and that of their students.

### **Physical Plant and Collection**

The Leonard and Bina Ellen Art Gallery's exhibition spaces represent a "white cube" gallery format, i.e., an open gallery space best suited to wall-hung art and sculpture. Its collection numbers over 1,700 works of art primarily concentrated in the area of Canadian art since the 1960s. Changing conditions for art making and collection maintenance over the years have led to a new set of requirements for the exhibition of artworks and collection management. Strategic priorities for the gallery include upgrading the gallery's exhibition spaces that now often require darkness and soundproofing, the acquisition of state of the art audio-visual equipment, the professional stewardship of its collection, and a planned solution to storage space issues. To this end, the Gallery Director will review current space and equipment needs that will clearly situate the Gallery's needs.

- The Ellen Gallery will ensure that its need for additional collection storage space (e.g., conservation, collection storage, preparation) is adequately defined and articulated in a policy statement and communicated to the University administration. Where possible, it will work with other University sectors (e.g., Libraries, Archives) that have similar needs to further those objectives. Finally, it will prepare a priority conservation list from its collection that can be processed as resources allow.
- The Ellen Gallery will work actively with the University administration to ensure that it has access to appropriately equipped programming and exhibition space and that its upgrading and equipment needs are considered together with those of other units in the University's master space plan.
- The Ellen Gallery will work with the University administration to arrange for the installation of interior and exterior signage that will draw greater attention to the location of the Gallery.

## **Ellen Gallery Strategic Plan 2009-2014**

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- The Ellen Gallery will examine the possibility of occupying street view space that respects its Department of Canadian Heritage Category A status and the various requirements of exhibiting contemporary art, when such opportunity arises. To this end, the Gallery will work with the University administration to ensure that the Gallery's needs are considered along with the needs of other units in the University's master space plan.
- The Ellen Gallery will ensure that its collection is appropriately insured and that insurance values are updated.

### **Finance**

The Leonard and Bina Ellen Art Gallery requires a similar level of resources as other university art galleries in order to thrive, and like most others, its funding comes from various sources. The Gallery is free and open to the public, and there is broad agreement that this should remain so. The Gallery's basic operating expenses are covered by the University, as is its currently occupied space. Other important contributors to the Gallery's funding include the Canada Council for the Arts, the *Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec*, the Department of Canadian Heritage, and external donors.

- In collaboration with relevant stakeholders, the Ellen Gallery will continue to build and diversify its funding base while continuing to track its success in such diversification.
- In consultation with its reporting structure, the Ellen Gallery will integrate its needs (e.g., human resources, physical plant, equipment) with those being outlined by the University in the "table of needs" that is being prepared for the upcoming comprehensive campaign. Where possible, similar needs should be grouped together to create economies and efficiencies.
- The Ellen Gallery will explore new sources of revenue that could accrue through collaboration with faculty members in the development of creative or research projects that help to financially support the Gallery's reputation and mission.
- The Ellen Gallery will review its publications distribution mechanisms and make recommendations for changes that will improve the visibility of the Gallery's contributions to the intellectual and creative life of the University.

### **Human Resources**

Currently, the Leonard and Bina Ellen Art Gallery has a mixture of permanent, contractual, and a high proportion of casual staff funded from operating and endowment funds. The proper functioning of the Gallery requires that its important operational functions (e.g., exhibitions,

## **Ellen Gallery Strategic Plan 2009-2014**

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technical services, public programs and education) be recognized as essential and its staffing attain a level of stability.

- The Ellen Gallery will establish a human resources model that allows it to meet its operational, programming, and collection conservation needs.
- To this end, the Gallery will create position summaries and work with the University administration to validate the model.
- Through implementation of the model, the Gallery will stabilize positions that are necessary to the Gallery, but vulnerable because of a tradition of filling these positions with casual employees.

### **Governance**

The Leonard and Bina Ellen Art Gallery is currently-housed in the Office of the President. It is the opinion of the committee that this location is not optimal for either the Gallery or the Office to which it reports. It also recognizes the importance of the volunteers who serve on its Advisory Council to the Gallery achieving its goals and vision. The active, collegial functioning of these structures benefits both the University and the Gallery.

- The Ellen Gallery will explore, based on discussions with the President and the Provost, situating itself in the Office of the Vice-President Research and Graduate Studies. Such a placement has precedence in several Canadian universities, recognizes the Ellen Gallery as a contributor to the University's creative and academic mission, and affords it similar forms of support as those received by other units that contribute in similar ways.
- The Ellen Gallery will ensure that its relevant policy statements, professional procedures and terms of reference are communicated to the University and ratified as necessary so as to formalize their status and promote a common understanding of the Gallery's governance in the context of relevant University policies.
- The Ellen Gallery will provide opportunities for its Advisory Council to participate in planning, support, and board development issues by sponsoring an annual, day-long retreat. This retreat will also create opportunities for members of the Advisory Board to enhance their own areas of expertise through concentrated interaction with one another.
- The Ellen Gallery will ensure that good governance is at the core of its activities, be they exhibitions, public programs, or publications, and that it is evident in its day-to-day dealings with the University community, the art community, and the general public.